

VI.

BILL WHYTE.

CHAPTER I.

'T is the Mind that makes the Body quick;
And as the Sun breaks through the darkest clouds,
So Honor peereth in the meanest habit.

SHAKSPEARE.

I HAD occasion, about three years ago, to visit the ancient burgh of Fortrose. It was early in winter; the days were brief, though pleasant, and the nights long and dark; and, as there is much in Fortrose which the curious traveller deems interesting, I had lingered amid its burying-grounds and its broken and mouldering tenements till the twilight had fairly set in. I had explored the dilapidated ruins of the Chanoury of Ross; seen the tomb of old Abbot Boniface and the bell blessed by the Pope; run over the complicated tracery of the Runic obelisk, which had been dug up, about sixteen years before, from under the foundations of the old parish church; and visited the low, long house, with its upper windows buried in the thatch, in which the far-famed Sir James Mackintosh had received the first rudiments of his education. And in all this I had been accompanied by a benevolent old man of the place, a mighty chronicler of the past, who, when a boy, had sat

on the same form with Sir James, and who on this occasion had seemed quite as delighted in meeting with a patient and interested listener as I had been in finding so intelligent and enthusiastic a storyteller. There was little wonder, then, that twilight should have overtaken me in such a place, and in such company.

There are two roads which run between Cromarty and Fortrose, — the one the king's highway, the other a narrow footpath that goes winding for several miles under the immense wall of cliffs which overhangs the northern shores of the Moray Frith, and then ascends to the top by narrow and doubtful traverses along the face of an immense precipice termed the Scarf's Crag. The latter route is by far the more direct and more pleasant of the two to the day-traveller; but the man should think twice who proposes taking it by night. The Scarf's Crag has been a scene of frightful accidents for the last two centuries. It is not yet more than twelve years since a young and very active man was precipitated from one of its higher ledges to the very beach, — a sheer descent of nearly two hundred feet; and a multitude of little cairns which mottle the sandy platform below bear witness to the not unfrequent occurrence of such casualties in the remote past. With the knowledge of all this, however, I had determined on taking the more perilous road. It is fully two miles shorter than the other; and, besides, in a life of undisturbed security a slight admixture of that feeling which the sense of danger awakens is a luxury which I have always deemed worth one's while running some little risk to procure. The night fell thick and dark while I was yet hurrying along the footway which leads under the cliffs; and, on reaching the Scarf's Crag, I could no longer distinguish the path, nor even catch the huge outline of the precipice between me and

the sky. I knew that the moon rose a little after nine, but it was still early in the evening; and, deeming it too long to wait its rising, I set myself to grope for the path, when, on turning an abrupt angle, I was dazzled by a sudden blaze of light from an opening in the rock. A large fire of furze and brushwood blazed merrily from the interior of a low-browed but spacious cave, bronzing with dusky yellow the huge volume of smoke which went rolling outwards along the roof, and falling red and strong on the face and hands of a thick-set, determined-looking man, well-nigh in his sixtieth year, who was seated before it on a block of stone. I knew him at once, as an intelligent, and, in the main, rather respectable gipsy, whom I had once met with about ten years before, and who had seen some service as a soldier, it was said, in the first British expedition to Egypt. The sight of his fire determined me at once. I resolved on passing the evening with him till the rising of the moon; and, after a brief explanation, and a blunt, though by no means unkind invitation to a place beside his fire, I took my seat, fronting him, on a block of granite which had been rolled from the neighboring beach. In less than half an hour we were on as easy terms as if we had been comrades for years; and, after beating over fifty different topics, he told me the story of his life, and found an attentive and interested auditor.

Who of all my readers is unacquainted with Goldsmith's admirable stories of the sailor with the wooden leg and the poor half-starved merry-andrew? Independently of the exquisite humor of the writer, they are suited to interest us from the sort of cross vistas which they open into scenes of life where every thought and aim and incident has at once all the freshness of novelty and all the truth of nature to recommend it. And I felt nearly the same

kind of interest in listening to the narrative of the gipsy. It was much longer than either of Goldsmith's stories, and perhaps less characteristic; but it presented a rather curious picture of a superior nature rising to its proper level through circumstances the most adverse; and, in the main, pleased me so well, that I think I cannot do better than present it to the reader.

"I was born, master," said the gipsy, "in this very cave, some sixty years ago, and so am a Scotchman like yourself. My mother, however, belonged to the Debatable-land; my father was an Englishman; and of my five sisters, one first saw the light in Jersey, another in Guernsey, a third in Wales, a fourth in Ireland, and the fifth in the Isle of Man. But this is a trifle, master, to what occurs in some families. It can't be much less than fifty years since my mother left us, one bright sunny day, on the English side of Kelso, and staid away about a week. We thought we had lost her altogether; but back she came at last; and when she did come, she brought with her a small sprig of a lad of about three summers or thereby. Father grumbled a little. We had got small fry enough already, he said, and bare enough and hungry enough they were at times; but mother showed him a pouch of yellow pieces, and there was no more grumbling. And so we called the little fellow Bill Whyte, as if he had been one of ourselves; and he grew up among us, as pretty a fellow as e'er the sun looked upon. I was a few years his senior; but he soon contrived to get half a foot ahead of me; and when we quarrelled, as boys will at times, master, I always came off second best. I never knew a fellow of a higher spirit. He would rather starve than beg, a hundred times over, and never stole in his life; but then for gin-setting, and deer-stalking, and black-fishing, not a poacher in the country

got beyond him; and when there was a smuggler in the Solway, who more active than Bill? He was barely nineteen, poor fellow, when he made the country too hot to hold him. I remember the night as well as if it were yesterday. The Cat-maran lugger was in the Frith, d'ye see, a little below Caerlaverock; and father and Bill, and some half-dozen more of our men, were busy in bumping the kegs ashore, and hiding them in the sand. It was a thick, smuggy night: we could hardly see fifty yards around us; and on our last trip, master, when we were down in the water to the gunwale, who should come upon us, in the turning of a handspike, but the revenue lads from Kirkcudbright! They hailed us to strike, in the devil's name. Bill swore he wouldn't. Flash went a musket, and the ball whistled through his bonnet. Well, he called on them to row up, and up they came; but no sooner were they within half-oar's length, than, taking up a keg, and raising it just as he used to do the putting-stone, he made it spin through their bottom as if the planks were of window glass, and down went their cutter in half a jiffy. They had wet powder that night, and fired no more bullets. Well, when they were gathering themselves up as they best could, — and, goodness be praised! there were no drownings amongst them, — we bumped our kegs ashore, hiding them with the others, and then fled up the country. We knew there would be news of our night's work; and so there was; for before next evening there were advertisements on every post for the apprehension of Bill, with an offered reward of twenty pounds.

“Bill was a bit of a scholar, — so am I, for that matter, — and the papers stared him on every side.

“‘Jack,’ he said to me, — ‘Jack Whyte, this will never do: the law's too strong for us now; and if I don't make

away with myself, they'll either have me tuck'd up or sent over the seas to slave for life. I'll tell you what I'll do. I stand six feet in my stocking-soles, and good men were never more wanted than at present. I'll cross the country this very night, and away to Edinburgh, where there are troops raising for foreign service. Better a musket than the gallows!'

"'Well, Bill,' I said, 'I don't care though I go with you. I'm a good enough man for my inches, though I ain't so tall as you, and I'm woundily tired of spoon-making.'

"And so off we set across the country that very minute, travelling by night only, and passing our days in any hiding hole we could find, till we reached Edinburgh, and there we took the bounty. Bill made as pretty a soldier as one could have seen in a regiment; and, men being scarce, I wasn't rejected neither; and after just three weeks' drilling, — and plaguey weeks they were, — we were shipped off, fully finished, for the south. Bonaparte had gone to Egypt, and we were sent after him to ferret him out; though we weren't told so at the time. And it was our good luck, master, to be put aboard of the same transport.

"Nothing like seeing the world for making a man smart. We had all sorts of people in our regiment, from the broken-down gentleman to the broken-down lamplighter; and Bill was catching from the best of them all he could. He knew he wasn't a gipsy, and had always an eye to getting on in the world; and as the voyage was a woundy long one, and we had the regimental schoolmaster aboard, Bill was a smarter fellow at the end of it than he had been at the beginning. Well, we reached Aboukir Bay at last. You have never been in Egypt, master; but just look across the Moray Frith here, on a sunshiny day, and you

will see a picture of it, if you but strike off the blue Highland hills, that rise behind, from the long range of low sandy hillocks that stretches away along the coast between Findhorn and Nairn. I don't think it was worth all the trouble it cost us; but the king surely knew best. Bill and I were in the first detachment, and we had to clear the way for the rest. The French were drawn up on the shore, as thick as flies on a dead snake, and the bullets rattled round us like a shower of May hail. It was a glorious sight, master, for a bold heart. The entire line of sandy coast seemed one unbroken streak of fire and smoke; and we could see the old tower of Aboukir rising like a fiery dragon at the one end, and the straggling village of Rosetta, half-cloud half-flame, stretching away on the other. There was a line of launches and gunboats behind us, that kept up an incessant fire on the enemy, and shot and shell went booming over our heads. We rowed shorewards, under a canopy of smoke and flame: the water was broken by ten thousand oars; and never, master, have you heard such cheering; it drowned the roar of the very cannon. Bill and I pulled at the same oar; but he bade me cheer, and leave the pulling to him.

“‘Cheer, Jack,’ he said, ‘cheer! I am strong enough to pull ten oars, and your cheering does my heart good.’

“I could see, in the smoke and the confusion, that there was a boat stove by a shell just besides us, and the man immediately behind me was shot through the head. But we just cheered and pulled all the harder; and the moment our keel touched the shore we leaped out into the water, middle deep, and, after one well-directed volley, charged up the beach with our bayonets fixed. I missed footing in the hurry, just as we closed, and a big-whiskered fellow in blue would have pinned me to the sand had not

Bill struck him through the wind-pipe, and down he fell above me; but when I strove to rise from under him, he grappled with me in his death agony, and the blood and breath came rushing through his wound in my face. Ere I had thrown him off my comrades had broken the enemy and were charging up the side of a sand-hill, where there were two field-pieces stationed that had sadly annoyed us in the landing. There came a shower of grape-shot whistling round me, that carried away my canteen and turned me half round; and when I looked up, I saw, through the smoke, that half my comrades were swept away by the discharge, and that the survivors were fighting desperately over the two guns, hand-to-hand with the enemy. Ere I got up to them, however, — and, trust me, master, I didn't linger, — the guns were our own. Bill stood beside one of them, all grim and bloody, with his bayonet dripping like an eaves-spout in a shower. He had struck down five of the French, besides the one he had levelled over me; and now, all of his own accord, — for our sergeant had been killed, — he had shotted the two pieces and turned them on the enemy. They all scampered down the hill, master, on the first discharge, — all save one brave, obstinate fellow, who stood firing upon us, not fifty yards away, half under cover of a sand-bank. I saw him load thrice ere I could hit him, and one of his balls whisked through my hat; but I caught him at last, and down he fell. My bullet went right through his forehead. We had no more fighting that day. The French fell back on Alexandria, and our troops advanced about three miles into the country, over a dreary waste of sand, and then lay for the night on their arms.

“In the morning, when we were engaged in cooking our breakfasts, master, making what fires we could with the

withered leaves of the date-tree, our colonel and two officers came up to us. The colonel was an Englishman, as brave a gentleman as ever lived, aye, and as kind an officer too. He was a fine-looking old man, as tall as Bill, and as well built too; but his health was much broken. It was said he had entered the army out of break-heart on losing his wife. Well, he came up to us, I say, and shook Bill by the hand as cordially as if he had been a colonel like himself. He was a brave, good soldier, he said, and, to show him how much he valued good men, he had come to make him a sergeant, in room of the one he had lost. He had heard he was a scholar, he said, and he trusted his conduct would not disgrace the halberd. Bill, you may be sure, thanked the colonel, and thanked him, master, very like a gentleman; and that very day he swaggered scarlet and a sword, as pretty a sergeant as the army could boast of; aye, and for that matter, though his experience was little, as fit for his place.

“For the first fortnight we didn’t eat the king’s biscuit for nothing. We had terrible hard fighting on the 13th; and, had not our ammunition failed us, we would have beaten the enemy all to rags; but for the last two hours we hadn’t a shot, and stood just like so many targets set up to be fired at. I was never more fixed in my life than when I saw my comrades falling around me, and all for nothing. Not only could I see them falling, but, in the absence of every other noise, — for we had ceased to cheer, and stood as silent and as hard as foxes, — I could hear the dull, hollow sound of the shot as it pierced them through. Sometimes the bullets struck the sand, and then rose and went rolling over the level, raising clouds of dust at every skip. At times we could see them coming through the air like little clouds, and singing all the way as they

came. But it was the frightful smoking shot that annoyed us most — these horrid shells. Sometimes they broke over our heads in the air as if a cannon charged with grape had been fired at us from out the clouds. At times they sank into the sand at our feet, and then burst up like so many Vesuviuses, giving at once death and burial to hundreds. But we stood our ground, and the day passed. I remember we got, towards evening, into a snug hollow between two sand-hills, where the shot skimmed over us, not two feet above our heads; but two feet is just as good as twenty, master; and I began to think, for the first time, that I hadn't got a smoke all day. I snapped my musket and lighted my pipe; and Bill, whom I hadn't seen since the day after the landing, came up to share with me.

“‘Bad day's work, Jack,’ he said; ‘but we have at least taught the enemy what British soldiers can endure, and ere long we shall teach them something more. But here comes a shell! Nay, do not move,’ he said; ‘it will fall just ten yards short.’ And down it came, roaring like a tempest, sure enough, about ten yards away, and sank into the sand. ‘There now, fairly lodged,’ said Bill; ‘lie down, lads, lie down.’ We threw ourselves flat on our faces; the earth heaved under us like a wave of the sea; and in a moment Bill and I were covered with half a ton of sand. But the pieces whizzed over us; and, save that the man who was across me had an ammunition-bag carried away, not one of us more than heard them. On getting ourselves disinterred, and our pipes re-lighted, Bill, with a twitch on the elbow — so — said he wished to speak with me a little apart; and we went out together into a hollow in front.

“‘You will think it strange, Jack,’ he said, ‘that all this day, when the enemy's bullets were hopping around us like

hail, there was but just one idea that filled my mind, and I could find room for no other. Ever since I saw Colonel Westhope, it has been forced upon me, through a newly-awakened, dream-like recollection, that he is the gentleman with whom I lived ere I was taken away by your people; for taken away I must have been. Your mother used to tell me that my father was a Cumberland gipsy, who met with some bad accident from the law; but I am now convinced she must have deceived me, and that my father was no such sort of man. You will think it strange, but when putting on my coat this morning, my eye caught the silver bar on the sleeve, and there leaped into my mind a vivid recollection of having worn a scarlet dress before, — scarlet bound with silver, — and that it was in the house of a gentleman and lady whom I had just learned to call papa and mamma. And every time I see the colonel, as I say, I am reminded of the gentleman. Now, for heaven's sake, Jack, tell me all you know about me. You are a few years my senior, and must remember better than I can myself under what circumstances I joined your tribe.'

“‘Why, Bill,’ I said, ‘I know little of the matter, and ’twere no great wonder though these bullets should confuse me somewhat in recalling what I do know. Most certainly we never thought you a gipsy like ourselves; but then I am sure mother never stole you; she had family enough of her own; and, besides, she brought with her for your board, she said, a purse with more gold in it than I have seen at one time before or since. I remember it kept us all comfortably in the *creature* for a whole twelve-month; and it wasn't a trifle, Bill, that could do that. You were at first like to die among us. You hadn't been accustomed to sleeping out, or to food such as ours. And, dear me! how the rags you were dressed in used to annoy

you; but you soon got over all, Bill, and became the hardiest little fellow among us. I once heard my mother say that you were a *love-begot*, and that your father, who was an English gentleman, had to part from both you and your mother on taking a wife. And no more can I tell you, Bill, for the life of me.'

'We slept that night on the sand, master, and found in the morning that the enemy had fallen back some miles nearer Alexandria. Next evening there was a party of us despatched on some secret service across the desert. Bill was with us; but the officer under whose special charge we were placed was a Captain Turpie, a nephew of Colonel Westhope, and his heir. But he heired few of his good qualities. He was the son of a pettifogging lawyer, and was as heartily hated by the soldiers as the colonel was beloved. Towards sunset the party reached a hollow valley in the waste, and there rested, preparatory, as we all intended, for passing the night. Some of us were engaged in erecting temporary huts of branches, some in providing the necessary materials; and we had just formed a snug little camp, and were preparing to light our fires for supper, when we heard a shot not two furlongs away. Bill, who was by far the most active among us, sprang up one of the tallest date trees to reconnoitre. But he soon came down again.

'“We have lost our pains this time,' he said; 'there is a party of French, of fully five times our number, not half a mile away.' The captain, on the news, wasn't slow, as you may think, in ordering us off; and, hastily gathering up our blankets and the contents of our knapsacks, we struck across the sand just as the sun was setting. There is scarce any twilight in Egypt, master; it is pitch dark twenty minutes after sunset. The first part of the evening,

too, is infinitely disagreeable. The days are burning hot, and not a cloud can be seen in the sky; but no sooner has the sun gone down than there comes on a thick white fog that covers the whole country, so that one can't see fifty yards around; and so icy cold is it, that it strikes a chill to the very heart. It is with these fogs that the dews descend; and deadly things they are. Well, the mist and the darkness came upon us at once; we lost all reckoning, and, after floundering on for an hour or so among the sand-hills, our captain called a halt, and bade us burrow as we best might among the hollows. Hungry as we were we were fain to leave our supper to begin the morning with, and huddled all together into what seemed a deep, dry ditch. We were at first surprised, master, to find an immense heap of stone under us, — we couldn't have lain harder had we lain on a Scotch cairn, — and that, d'ye see, is unusual in Egypt, where all the sand has been blown by the hot winds from the desert, hundreds of miles away, and where, in the course of a few days' journey, one mayn't see a pebble larger than a pigeon's egg. There were hard, round, bullet-like masses under us, and others of a more oblong shape, like pieces of wood that had been cut for fuel; and, tired as we were, their sharp points, protruding through the sand, kept most of us from sleep. But that was little, master, to what we felt afterwards. As we began to take heat together, there broke out among us a most disagreeable stench, — bad at first, but unlike anything I had felt before, but at last altogether overpowering. Some of us became dead sick, and some, to show how much bolder they were than the rest, began to sing. One half the party stole away, one by one, and lay down outside. For my own part, master, I thought it was the plague that was breaking out upon us from below, and lay

still in despair of escaping it. I was wretchedly tired too; and, despite of my fears and the stench, I fell asleep, and slept till daylight. But never before, master, did I see such a sight as when I awoke. We had been sleeping on the carcasses of ten thousand Turks, whom Bonaparte had massacred about a twelvemonth before. There were eyeless skulls, grinning at us by hundreds from the side of the ditch, and black, withered hands and feet sticking out, with the white bones glittering between the shrunken sinews. The very sand, for roods around, had a brown ferruginous tinge, and seemed baked into a half-solid mass resembling clay. It was no place to loiter in, and you may trust me, master, we breakfasted elsewhere. Bill kept close to our captain all that morning. He didn't much like him, even so early in their acquaintance as this, — no one did, in fact, — but he was anxious to learn from him all he could regarding the colonel. He told him, too, something about his own early recollections; but he would better have kept them to himself. From that hour, master, Captain Turpie never gave him a pleasant look, and sought every means to ruin him.

“ We joined the army again on the evening of the 20th March. You know, master, what awaited us next morning. I had been marching, on the day of our arrival, for twelve hours under a very hot sun, and was fatigued enough to sleep soundly. But the dead might have awakened next morning. The enemy broke in upon us about three o'clock. It was pitch dark. I had been dreaming, at the moment, that I was busily engaged in the landing, fighting in the front rank beside Bill; and I awoke to hear the enemy outside the tent struggling in fierce conflict with such of my comrades as, half-naked and half-armed, had been roused by the first alarm, and had rushed out to oppose

them. You will not think that I was long in joining them, master, when I tell you that Bill himself was hardly two steps ahead of me. Colonel Westhope was everywhere at once that morning, bringing his men, in the darkness and the confusion, into something like order, — threatening, encouraging, applauding, issuing orders, all in a breath. Just as we got out, the French broke through beside our tent, and we saw him struck down in the throng. Bill gave a tremendous cry of ‘Our colonel! our colonel!’ and struck his pike up to the cross into the breast of the fellow who had given the blow. And hardly had that one fallen than he sent it crashing through the face of the next foremost, till it lay buried in the brain. The enemy gave back for a moment; and as he was striking down a third the colonel got up, badly wounded in the shoulder; but he kept the field all day. He knew Bill the moment he rose, and leant on him till he had somewhat recovered. ‘I shall not forget, Bill,’ he said, ‘that you have saved your colonel’s life.’ We had a fierce struggle, master, ere we beat out the French; but, broken and half-naked as we were, we did beat them out, and the battle became general.

“At first the flare of the artillery, as the batteries blazed out in the darkness, dazzled and blinded me; but I loaded and fired incessantly; and the thicker the bullets went whistling past me, the faster I loaded and fired. A spent shot, that had struck through a sand-bank, came rolling on like a bowl, and, leaping up from a hillock in front, struck me on the breast. It was such a blow, master, as a man might have given with his fist; but it knocked me down, and ere I got up, the company was a few paces in advance. The bonnet of the soldier who had taken my place came rolling to my feet ere I could join them. But alas! it was

full of blood and brains; and I found that the spent shot had come just in time to save my life. Meanwhile, the battle raged with redoubled fury on the left, and we in the centre had a short respite. And some of us needed it. For my own part, I had fired about a hundred rounds; and my right shoulder was as blue as your waistcoat.

“You will wonder, master, how I should notice such a thing in the heat of an engagement; but I remember nothing better than that there was a flock of little birds shrieking and fluttering over our heads for the greater part of the morning. The poor little things seemed as if robbed of their very instinct by the incessant discharges on every side of them; and, instead of pursuing a direct course, which would soon have carried them clear of us, they kept fluttering in helpless terror in one little spot. About mid-day, an aide-de-camp went riding by us to the right.

“‘How goes it? how goes it?’ asked one of our officers.

“‘It is just who will,’ replied the aide-de-camp, and passed by like lightning. Another followed hard after.

“‘How goes it now?’ inquired the officer.

“‘Never better, boy!’ said the second rider. ‘The forty-second have cut Bonaparte’s invincibles to pieces, and all the rest of the enemy are falling back!’

“We came more into action a little after. The enemy opened a heavy fire upon us, and seemed advancing to the charge. I had felt so fatigued, master, during the previous pause, that I could scarcely raise my hand to my head; but, now that we were to be engaged again, all my fatigue left me, and I found myself grown fresh as ever. There were two field pieces to our left that had done noble execution during the day; and Captain Turpie’s company, including Bill and me, were ordered to stand by them in the

expected charge. They were wrought mostly by seamen from the vessels, — brave, tight fellows who, like Nelson, never saw fear; but they had been so busy that they had shot away most of their ammunition; and, as we came up to them, they were about despatching a party to the rear for more.

“‘Right,’ said Captain Turpie; ‘I don’t care though I lend you a hand, and go with you.’

“‘On your peril, sir!’ said Bill Whyte. ‘What! leave your company in the moment of the expected charge! I shall assuredly report you for cowardice and desertion of quarters if you do.’

“‘And I shall have you broke for mutiny,’ said the captain. ‘How can these fellows know how to choose their ammunition without some one to direct them?’

“And so off he went to the rear with the sailors; but, though they returned, poor fellows, in ten minutes or so, we saw no more of the captain till evening. On came the French in their last charge. Ere they could close with us the sailors had fired their field-pieces thrice, and we could see wide avenues opened among them with each discharge. But on they came. Our bayonets crossed and clashed with theirs for one half-minute, and in the next they were hurled headlong down the declivity, and we were fighting among them pell-mell. There are few troops superior to the French, master, in a first attack; but they want the bottom of the British; and, now that we had broken them in the moment of their onset, they had no chance with us, and we pitched our bayonets into them as if they had been so many sheaves in harvest. They lay in some places three and four tiers deep; for our blood was up, master; just as they advanced on us we had heard of the death of our general, and they neither asked for

quarter nor got it. Ah, the good and gallant Sir Ralph! We all felt as if we had lost a father; but he died as the brave best love to die. The field was all our own; and not a Frenchman remained who was not dead or dying. That action, master, fairly broke the neck of their power in Egypt.

“Our colonel was severely wounded, as I have told you, early in the morning; but, though often enough urged to retire, he had held out all day, and had issued his orders with all the coolness and decision for which he was so remarkable; but now that the excitement of the fight was over his strength failed him at once, and he had to be carried to his tent. He called for Bill to assist in bearing him off. I believe it was merely that he might have the opportunity of speaking to him. He told him that, whether he died or lived, he would take care that he should be provided for. He gave Captain Turpie charge, too, that he should keep a warm side to Bill. I overheard our major say to the captain, as we left the tent, ‘Good heavens! did you ever see two men liker one another than the colonel and our new sergeant?’ But the captain carelessly remarked that the resemblance didn’t strike him.

“We met outside with a comrade. He had had a cousin in the forty-second, he said, who had been killed that morning, and he was anxious to see the body decently buried, and wished us to go along with him. And so we both went. It is nothing, master, to see men struck down in warm blood, and when one’s own blood is up; but oh, ’tis a grievous thing, after one has cooled down to one’s ordinary mood, to go out among the dead and the dying! We passed through what had been the thick of the battle. The slain lay in hundreds and thousands, — like the ware and tangle on the shore below us, — horribly broken, some

of them, by the shot; and blood and brains lay spattered on the sand. But it was a worse sight to see, when some poor wretch, who had no chance of living an hour longer, opened his eyes as we passed and cried out for water. We soon emptied our canteens, and then had to pass on. In no place did the dead lie thicker than where the forty-second had engaged the invincibles; and never were there finer fellows. They lay piled in heaps, — the best men of Scotland over the best men of France, — and their wounds and their number and the postures in which they lay showed how tremendous the struggle had been. I saw one gigantic corpse with the head and neck cloven through the steel cap to the very brisket. It was that of a Frenchman; but the hand that had drawn the blow lay cold and stiff not a yard away, with the broadsword still firm in its grasp. A little further on we found the body we sought. It was that of a fair young man. The features were as composed as if he were asleep; there was even a smile on the lips; but a cruel cannon-shot had torn the very heart out of the breast. Evening was falling. There was a little dog whining and whimpering over the body, aware, it would seem, that some great ill had befallen its master, but yet tugging from time to time at his clothes, that he might rise and come away.

“ ‘Ochon, ochon! poor Evan M'Donald!’ exclaimed our comrade; ‘what would Christy Ross or your good old mother say to see you lying here!’”

“Bill burst out a-crying as if he had been a child; and I couldn't keep dry-eyed neither, master. But grief and pity are weaknesses of the bravest natures. We scooped out a hole in the sand with our bayonets and our hands, and burying the body, came away.

“The battle of the 21st broke — as I have said — the

strength of the French in Egypt; for though they didn't surrender to us until about five months after, they kept snug behind their walls, and we saw little more of them. Our colonel had gone aboard of the frigate desperately ill of his wounds; so ill that it was several times reported he was dead; and most of our men were suffering sadly from sore eyes ashore. But such of us as escaped had little to do, and we contrived to while away the time agreeably enough. Strange country, Egypt, master. You know our people have come from there; but, trust me, I could find none of my cousins among either the Turks or the Arabs. The Arabs, master, are quite the gipsies of Egypt; and Bill and I — but he paid dearly for them afterwards, poor fellow — used frequently to visit such of their straggling tribes as came to the neighborhood of our camp. You and the like of you, master, are curious to see *our* people, and how we get on; and no wonder; and we were just as curious to see the Arabs. Towards evening they used to come in from the shore or the desert in parties of ten or twelve. And wild-looking fellows they were; tall, but not very tall, thin and skinny and dark, and an amazing proportion of them blind of an eye, — an effect, I suppose, of the disease from which our comrades were suffering so much. In a party of ten or twelve — and their parties rarely exceeded a dozen — we found that every one of them had some special office to perform. One carried a fishing-net, like a herring have; one, perhaps, a basket of fish, newly caught; one a sheaf of wheat; one a large copper basin, or rather platter; one a bundle of the dead boughs and leaves of the date-tree; one the implements for lighting a fire; and so on. The first thing they always did, after squatting down in a circle, was to strike a light; the next to dig a round pot-like hole in the sand, in

which they kindle their fire. When the sand had become sufficiently hot, they throw out the embers, and placing the fish, just as they had caught them, in the bottom of the hole, heaped the hot sand over them, and the fire over that. The sheaf of wheat was next untied, and each taking a handful, held it over the flame till it was sufficiently scorched, and then rubbed out the grain between their hands into the copper plate. The fire was then drawn off a second time, and the fish dug out; and, after rubbing off the sand and taking out the bowels, they sat down to supper. And such, master, was the ordinary economy of the poorer tribes, that seemed drawn to the camp merely by curiosity. Some of the others brought fruit and vegetables to our market, and were much encouraged by our officers. But a set of greater rascals never breathed. At first several of our men got flogged through them. They had a trick of raising a hideous outcry in the market-place for every trifle, certain, d'ye see, of attracting the notice of some of our officers, who were all sure to take part with them. The market, master, had to be encouraged at all events; and it was some time ere the tricks of the rascals were understood in the proper quarter. But, to make short, Bill and I went out one morning to our walk. We had just heard — and heavy news it was to the whole regiment — that our colonel was despaired of, and had no chance of seeing out the day. Bill was in miserably low spirits. Captain Turpie had insulted him most grossly that morning. So long as the colonel had been expected to recover, he had shown him some degree of civility; but he now took every opportunity of picking a quarrel with him. There was no comparison in battle, master, between Bill and the captain, for the captain, I suspect, was little better than a coward; but then there was just as little on parade the other way;

for Bill, you know, couldn't know a great deal, and the captain was a perfect martinet. He had called him vagrant and beggar, master, for omitting some little piece of duty. Now he couldn't help having been with *us*, you know; and as for beggary, he had never begged in his life. Well, we had walked out towards the market, as I say.

“ ‘It's all nonsense, Jack,’ says he, ‘to be so dull on the matter; I'll e'en treat you to some fruit. I have a Sicilian dollar here. See that lazy fellow with the spade lying in front, and the burning mountain smoking behind him. We must see if he can't dig out for us a few *prans*' worth of dates.’

“Well, master, up he went to a tall, thin, rascally-looking Arab, with one eye, and bought as much fruit from him as might come to one tenth of the dollar which he gave him, and then held out his hand for the change. But there was no change forthcoming. Bill wasn't a man to be done out of his cash in that silly way, and so he stormed at the rascal; but he, in turn, stormed as furiously, in his own lingo, at him, till at last Bill's blood got up, and, seizing him by the breast, he twisted him over his knee as one might a boy of ten years or so. The fellow raised a hideous outcry, as if Bill were robbing and murdering him. Two officers, who chanced to be in the market at the time, came running up at the noise. One of them was the scoundrel Turpie; and Bill was laid hold of, and sent off under guard to the camp. Poor fellow, he got scant justice there. Turpie had procured a man-of-war's-man, who swore, as well he might, indeed, that Bill was the smuggler who had swamped the Kirkeudbright custom-house boat. There was another brought forward who swore that both of us were gipsies, and told a blasted rigmarole story, without one word of truth in it, about the stealing of a silver spoon.

The Arab had his story, too, in his own lingo ; and they received every word ; for my evidence went for nothing. I was of a race who never spoke the truth, they said, as if I weren't as good as a Mohammedan Arab. To crown all, in came Turpic's story about what he called Bill's mutinous spirit in the action of the 21st. You may guess the rest, master. The poor fellow was broke that morning, and told that, were it not in consideration of his bravery, he would have got a flogging into the bargain.

“I spent the evening of that day with Bill outside the camp, and we ate the dates together that in the morning had cost him so dear. The report had gone abroad, — luckily a false one, — that our colonel was dead ; and that put an end to all hope with the poor fellow of having his case righted. We spoke together for I am sure two hours ; spoke of Bill's early recollections, and of the hardship of his fate all along. And it was now worse with him, he said, than it had ever been before. He spoke of the strange, unaccountable hostility of Turpic ; and I saw his brow grow dark, and the veins of his neck swell almost to bursting. He trusted they might yet meet, he said, where there would be none to note who was the officer and who the private soldier. I did my best, master, to console the poor fellow, and we parted. The first thing I saw, as I opened the tent-door next morning, was Captain Turpic, brought into the camp by the soldier whose cousin Bill and I had assisted to bury. The captain was leaning on his shoulder, somewhat less than half alive, as it seemed, with four of his front teeth struck out, and a stream of blood all along his vest and small clothes. He had been met with by Bill, who had attacked him, he said, and, after breaking his sword, would have killed him, had not the soldier come up and interfered. But that, master, was the captain's

story. The soldier told me afterwards that he saw the captain draw his sword ere Bill lifted hand at all; and that, when the poor fellow did strike, he gave him only one knock-down blow on the mouth, that laid him insensible at his feet; and that, when down, though he might have killed him twenty times over, he didn't so much as crook a finger on him. Nay, more, Bill offered to deliver himself up to the soldier, had not the latter assured him that he would to a certainty be shot, and advised him to make off. There was a party despatched in quest of him, master, the moment Turpie had told his story; but he was lucky enough, poor fellow, to elude them; and they returned in the evening just as they had gone out. And I saw no more of Bill in Egypt, master.

CHAPTER II.

“AFTER all our fears and regrets, master, our colonel recovered, and one morning about four months after the action, came ashore to see us. We were sadly pestered with flies, master. They buzzed all night by millions round our noses, and many a plan did we think of to get rid of them; but after destroying hosts on hosts, they still seemed as thick as before. I had fallen on a new scheme this morning. I placed some sugar on a board, and surrounded it with gunpowder; and when the flies had settled by thousands on the sugar, I fired the gunpowder by means of a train, and the whole fell dead on the floor of the tent. I had just got a capital shot, when up came the colonel and sat down beside me.

“‘I wish to know,’ he said, all you can tell me about Bill Whyte. You were his chief friend and companion, I have heard, and are acquainted with his early history. Can you tell me aught of his parentage?’

“‘Nothing of that, Colonel,’ I said; ‘and yet I have known Bill almost ever since he knew himself.’

“And so, master, I told him all that I knew: how Bill had been first taken to us by my mother; of the purse of gold she had brought with her, which had kept us all so merry; and of the noble spirit he had shown among us when he grew up. I told him, too, of some of Bill’s early recollections; of the scarlet dress trimmed with silver, which had been brought to his mind by the sergeant’s coat the first day he wore it; of the gentleman and lady, too, whom he remembered to have lived with; and of the supposed resemblance he had found between the former and the colonel. The colonel, as I went on, was strangely agitated, master. He held an open letter in his hand, and seemed every now and then to be comparing particulars; and when I mentioned Bill’s supposed recognition of him, he actually started from off his seat.

“‘Good heavens!’ he exclaimed, ‘why was I not brought acquainted with this before?’

“I explained the why, master, and told him all about Captain Turpie; and he left me with, you may be sure, no very favorable opinion of the captain. But I must now tell you, master, a part of my story, which I had but from hearsay.

“The colonel had been getting over the worse effects of his wound, when he received a letter from a friend in England informing him that his brother-in-law, the father of Captain Turpie, had died suddenly, and that his sister, who to all appearance was fast following, had been making

strange discoveries regarding an only son of the colonel's, who was supposed to have been drowned about seventeen years before. The colonel had lost both his lady and child by a frightful accident. His estate lay near Olney, on the banks of the Ouse; and the lady one day, during the absence of the colonel, who was in London, was taking an airing in the carriage with her son, a boy of three years or so, when the horses took fright, and, throwing the coachman, who was killed on the spot, rushed into the river. The Ouse is a deep, sluggish stream, dark and muddy in some of the more dangerous pools, and mantled over with weeds. It was into one of these the carriage was overturned. Assistance came late, and the unfortunate lady was brought out a corpse; but the body of the child was nowhere to be found. It now came out, however, from the letter, that the child had been picked up unhurt by the colonel's brother-in-law, who, after concealing it for nearly a week during the very frenzy of the colonel's distress, had then given it to a gipsy. The rascal's only motive — he was a lawyer, master — was, that his own son, the captain, who was then a boy of twelve years or so, and not wholly ignorant of the circumstance, might succeed to the colonel's estate. The writer of the letter added that, on coming to the knowledge of this singular confession, he had made instant search after the gipsy to whom the child had been given, and had been fortunate enough to find her, after tracing her over half the kingdom, in a cave near Fortrose, in the north of Scotland. She had confessed all; stating, however, that the lad, who had borne among the tribe the name of Bill Whyte, and had turned out a fine fellow, had been outlawed for some smuggling feat, about eighteen months before, and had enlisted with a young man, her son, into a regiment bound for Egypt.

You see, master, there couldn't be a shadow of doubt that my comrade Bill Whyte was just Henry Westhope, the colonel's son and heir. But the grand matter was where to find him. Search as we might, all search was in vain. We could trace him no further than outside the camp to where he had met with Captain Turpie. I should tell you, by the way, that the captain was now sent to Coventry by every one, and that not an officer in the regiment would return his salute.

“ Well, master, the months passed, and at length the French surrendered; and, having no more to do in Egypt, we all re-embarked, and sailed for England. The short peace had been ratified before our arrival; and I, who had become heartily tired of the life of a soldier now that I had no one to associate with, was fortunate enough to obtain my discharge. The colonel retired from the service at the same time. He was as kind to me as if he had been my father, and offered to make me his forester if I would but come and live beside him. But I was too fond of a wandering life for that. He was corresponding, he told me, with every British consul within fifteen hundred miles of the Nile; but he had heard nothing of Bill, master. Well, after seeing the colonel's estate, I parted from him, and came north to find out my people, which I soon did; and, for a year or so, I lived with them just as I have been doing since. I was led in the course of my wanderings to Leith, and was standing one morning on the pier among a crowd of people, who had gathered round to see a fine vessel from the Levant that was coming in at the time, when my eye caught among the sailors a man exceedingly like Bill. He was as tall, and even more robust, and he wrought with all Bill's activity; but for some time I could not catch a glimpse of his face. At length, however, he

turned round, and there, sure enough, was Bill himself. I was afraid to hail him, master, not knowing who among the crowd might also know him, and know him also as a deserter or an outlaw ; but you may be sure I wasn't long in leaping aboard and making up to him. And we were soon as happy, master, in one of the cellars of the Coal Hill, as we had been all our lives before.

“ Bill told me his history since our parting. He had left the captain lying at his feet, and struck across the sand in the direction of the Nile, one of the mouths of which he reached next day. He there found some Greek sailors, who were employed in watering ; and, assisting them in their work, he was brought aboard their vessel, and engaged as a seaman by the master, who had lost some of his crew by the plague. As you may think, master, he soon became a prime sailor, and continued with the Greeks, trading among the islands of the Archipelago for about eighteen months, when, growing tired of the service, and meeting with an English vessel, he had taken a passage home. I told him how much ado we had all had about him after he had left us, and how we were to call him Bill Whyte no longer. And so, in short, master, we set out together for Colonel Westhope's.

“ In our journey we met with some of our people on a wild moor of Cumberland, and were invited to pass the night with them. They were of the Curlit family ; but you will hardly know them by that. Two of them had been with us when Bill swamped the custom-house boat. They were fierce, desperate fellows, and not much to be trusted by their friends even ; and I was afraid that they might have somehow come to guess that Bill had brought some clinkers home with him. And so, master, I would fain have dissuaded him from making any stay with

them in the night-time ; for I did not know, you see, in what case we might find our *weasands* in the morning. But Bill had no fears of any kind, and was, beside, desirous to spend one last night with the gipsies ; and so he staid. The party had taken up their quarters in a waste house on the moor, with no other human dwelling within four miles of it. There was a low, stunted wood on the one side, master, and a rough, sweeping stream on the other. The night, too, was wild and boisterous ; and, what between suspicion and discomfort, I felt well-nigh as drearily as I did when lying among the dead men in Egypt. We were nobly treated, however, and the whiskey flowed like water. But we drank no more than was good for us. Indeed, Bill was never a great drinker ; and I kept on my guard, and refused the liquor on the plea of a bad head. I should have told you that there were but three of the Curlits — all of them raw-boned fellows, however, and all of them of such stamp that the three have since been hung. I saw they were sounding Bill ; but he seemed aware of them.

“‘Aye, aye,’ says he, ‘I have made something by my voyaging, lads, though, mayhap, not a great deal. What think you of that there now, for instance ?’ — drawing, as he spoke, a silver-mounted pistol out of each pocket. ‘These are pretty pops, and as good as they are pretty. The worst of them sends a bullet through an inch-board at twenty yards.’

“‘Are they loaded, Bill ?’ asked Tom Curlit.

“‘To be sure,’ said Bill, returning them again each to its own pouch. ‘What is the use of an empty pistol ?’

“‘Ah,’ replied Tom, ‘I smell a rat, Bill. You have given over making war on the king’s account, and have taken the road to make war on your own. Bold enough, to be sure.’

“From the moment they saw the pistols, the brothers seemed to have changed their plan regarding us; for some plan I am certain they had. They would now fain have taken us into partnership with them; but their trade was a woundy bad one, master, with a world more of risk than profit.

“‘Why, lads,’ said Tom Curlit to Bill and me, ‘hadn’t you better stay with us altogether? The road won’t do in these days at all. No, no; the law is a vast deal over-strong for that, and you will be tuckered up like dogs for your very first affair. But if you stay with us, you will get on in a much quieter way on this wild moor here. Plenty of game, Bill; and sometimes, when the nights are long, we contrive to take a purse with as little trouble as may be. We had an old peddler only three weeks ago that brought us sixty good pounds. By the way, brothers, we must throw a few more sods over him, for I nosed him this morning as I went by. And, lads, we have something in hand just now, that, with, to be sure, a little more risk, will pay better still. Two hundred yellow boys in hand, and five hundred more when our work is done. Better that, Bill, than standing to be shot at for a shilling per day.’

“‘Two hundred in hand and five hundred more when you have done your work!’ exclaimed Bill. ‘Why, that is sure enough princely pay, unless the work be very bad indeed. But come, tell us what you propose. You can’t expect us to make it a leap-in-the-dark matter.’

“‘The work is certainly a little dangerous,’ said Tom, ‘and we of ourselves are rather few; but if you both join with us there would be a vast deal less of danger indeed. The matter is just this. A young fellow, like ourselves, has a rich old uncle, who has made his will in his favor; but then he threatens to make another will that won’t be

so favorable to him by half; and you see the drawing across of a knife — so — would keep the first one in force. And that is all we have to do before pocketing the blunt. But then the old fellow is as brave as a lion, and there are two servants with him, worn-out soldiers like himself, that would, I am sure, be rough customers. With your help, however, we shall get on primely. The old boy's house stands much alone, and we shall be five to three.'

“‘Well, well,’ said Bill; ‘we shall give your proposal a night's thought, and tell you what we think of it in the morning. But remember, no tricks, Tom! If we engage in the work, we must go share and share alike in the booty.’

“‘To be sure,’ said Tom; and so the conversation closed.

“About eight o'clock or so, master, I stepped out to the door. The night was dark and boisterous as ever, and there had come on a heavy rain. But I could see that, dark and boisterous as it was, some one was approaching the house with a dark lantern. I lost no time in telling the Curlits so.

“‘It must be the captain,’ said they, ‘though it seems strange that he should come here to-night. You must away, Jack and Bill, to the loft, for it mayn't do for the captain to find you here; but you can lend us a hand afterwards, should need require it.’

“There was no time for asking explanations, master, and so up we climbed to the loft, and had got snugly concealed among some old hay, when in came the captain. But what captain, think you? Why, just our old acquaintance Captain Turpie!

“‘Lads,’ he said to the Curlits, ‘make yourselves ready; get your pistols. Our old scheme is blown, for the colonel

has left his house at Olney on a journey to Scotland ; but he passes here to-night, and you must find means to stop him, — now or never !’

“ ‘ What force and what arms has he with him, captain ? ’ asked Tom.

“ ‘ The coachman, his body servant, and himself,’ said the captain ; ‘ but only the servant and himself are armed. The stream outside is high to-night ; you must take them just as they are crossing it, and thinking of only the water ; and whatever else you may mind, make sure of the colonel.’

“ ‘ Sure as I live,’ said Bill to me, in a low whisper, ‘ ’tis a plan to murder Colonel Westhope ! And, good heavens ! ’ he continued, pointing through an opening in the gable, ‘ yonder is his carriage not a mile away. You may see the lantern, like two fiery eyes, coming sweeping along the moor. We have no time to lose. Let us slide down through the opening and meet with it.’

“ As soon done as said, master. We slid down along the turf gable ; crossed the stream, which had risen high on its banks, by a plank bridge for foot-passengers ; and then dashed along the broken road in the direction of the carriage. We came up to it as it was slowly crossing an open drain.

“ ‘ Colonel Westhope ! ’ I cried, ‘ Colonel Westhope ! — stop ! — stop ! — turn back ! You are waylaid by a party of ruffians, who will murder you if you go on.’

The door opened, and the colonel stepped out, with his sword under his left arm, and a cocked pistol in his hand.

“ ‘ Is not that Jack Whyte ? ’ he asked.

“ ‘ The same, noble colonel,’ I said ; ‘ and here is Henry, your son.’

“ It was no place or time, master, for long explanations ; there was one hearty congratulation, and one hurried em-

brace ; and the colonel, after learning from Bill the number of the assailants and the plan of the attack, ordered the carriage to drive on slowly before, and followed, with us and his servant, on foot, behind.

“ ‘ The rascals,’ he said, ‘ will be so dazzled with the flare of the lanterns in front, that we will escape notice till they have fired, and then we shall have them for the picking down.’

“ And so it was, master. Just as the carriage was entering the stream, the coachman was pulled down by Tom Curlit ; at the same instant, three bullets went whizzing through the glasses, and two fellows came leaping out from behind some furze to the carriage door. A third, whom I knew to be the captain, lagged behind. I marked him, however ; and when the colonel and Bill were disposing of the other two, — and they took them so sadly by surprise, master, that they had but little difficulty in throwing them down and binding them, — I was lucky enough to send a piece of lead through the captain. He ran about twenty yards, and then dropped down stone dead. Tom escaped us ; but he cut a throat some months after, and suffered for it at Carlisle. And his two brothers, after making a clean breast, and confessing all, were transported for life. But they found means to return in a few years after, and were both hung on the gallows on which Tom had suffered before them.

“ I have not a great deal more to tell you, master. The colonel has been dead for the last twelve years, and his son has succeeded him in his estate. There is not a completer gentleman in England than Henry Westhope, master, nor a finer fellow. I call on him every time I go round, and never miss a hearty welcome ; though, by the by, I am quite as sure of a hearty scold. He still keeps a snug little

house empty for me, and offers to settle on me fifty pounds a year, whenever I choose to give up my wandering life and go and live with him. But what's bred in the bone won't come out of the flesh, master, and I have not yet closed with his offer. And really, to tell you my mind, I don't think it quite respectable. Here I am, at present, a free, independent tinker, — no man more respectable than a tinker, master, all allow that, — whereas, if I go and live with Bill, on an unwrought-for fifty pounds a year, I will be hardly better than a mere master-tailor or shoemaker. No, no, that would never do! Nothing like respectability, master, let a man fare as hard as he may."

I thanked the gipsy for his story, and told him I thought it almost worth while putting into print. He thanked me, in turn, for liking it so well, and assured me I was quite at liberty to put it in print as soon as I chose. And so I took him at his word.

"But yonder," said he, "is the moon rising, red and huge, over the three tops of Belrinnes, and throwing, as it brightens, its long strip of fire across the frith. Take care of your footing just as you reach the top of the crag; there is an awkward gap there, on the rock edge, that reminds me of an Indian trap; but as for the rest of the path, you will find it quite as safe as by day. Good-bye."

I left him, and made the best of my way home, where, while the facts were fresh in my mind, I committed to paper the gipsy's story.